

**Frequently Asked Questions on the City of Birmingham's
Face Covering Ordinance
Updated May 1, 2020**

Must a face covering be worn in Birmingham?

Yes. As of May 1, 2020, if you are frequenting a business, taking public transit, getting healthcare, entering a facility that is allowed to stay open or working an essential job that interacts with the public, then you must cover your face.

Why a face covering ordinance?

COVID-19 can be spread by people who are not showing symptoms. So, covering your face, washing your hands and physical distancing will help prevent the spread of the virus to others. Covering your face also helps keep our neighbors and the community safe.

How well do cloth face coverings work to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Remember, cloth face coverings are not a substitute for physical distancing, washing hands or staying home when ill, but they may be helpful when combined with these primary interventions. According to the CDC, evidence suggests that use of cloth face coverings could help reduce the transmission of COVID-19. The primary role of the cloth face covering is to reduce the release of infectious particles into the air when someone speaks, coughs, or sneezes, including someone who has COVID-19 but feels well.

If you plan to use a face covering, it is important to keep your nose and mouth covered. Lowering the covering from your nose and mouth while talking defeats the purpose of wearing the face covering since you can spread the virus while talking.

When should I wear a cloth face covering?

You are asked to wear a cloth face covering over your nose and mouth when you out in public in Birmingham, especially around people. Wearing a cloth face covering does not eliminate the need to physically distance yourself from others or to wash your hands frequently. Face coverings are

not needed at home, in your car alone or if you are only with members of your household or if you are exercising outdoors (i.e. walking, hiking, bicycling or running).

Which groups are not required to cover their face?

All individuals are asked to wear face coverings in public places, while shopping or riding on public transit. However, there are some special exemptions: children under a certain age, health and safety reasons, and businesses.

Children

According to guidance from the CDC, children under 2 years old must not wear a face covering because they may suffocate. Parents and caregivers should use their best judgment in determining when and where their child should wear a face covering.

Health and Safety Reasons

If a face covering poses greater risk to an individual's mental or physical health than not wearing one, then an individual is not required to wear a face covering.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- If you have documentation from a medical professional that tells you, you do not have to cover your face
- If you have trouble breathing
- If you are unable to remove a face covering without assistance
- If you have a physical disability that prevents you from wearing a face covering
- If you have sensory disabilities (such as autism)
- If you are deaf and use facial and mouth movements, you can remove your face covering while signing and encourage interpreters to do the same
- If you have mental health challenges that prevent you from covering your face

Businesses

If a face covering in the business place creates a safety hazard, then it may be exempted.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Working from ladders or at height
- When other respiratory protection is required
- When operating heavy machinery and the mask impairs hearing or communication
- Moving heavy equipment such that it could be constituted as exercise

Face coverings should be worn in elevators, restrooms and kitchen areas in businesses, buildings, facilities, etc. However, if business is conducted with limited public interaction or on a secure site, employers should use their best judgment in determining where face coverings should be worn.

What is a cloth face covering?

A cloth face covering is a material that covers the nose and mouth. It can be secured to the head with ties or straps or simply wrapped around the lower face. It can be made of a variety of materials, such as cotton, silk, or linen. A cloth face covering may be factory-made, sewn by hand or can be improvised from household items such as scarfs, T-shirts, sweatshirts, etc. These are best made with fabric and allows for breathing without restriction.

What are my face covering options?

Acceptable, reusable face covering options include:

- Bandana, scarf
- Neck gaiter or homemade face covering
- Tightly woven fabric, such as cotton T-shirts and some type of towels
- Again, a medical grade face covering or store-bought face covering is not required
- For information on how to make a face covering, visit this link: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

How should I care for a cloth face covering?

It's a good idea to wash your cloth face covering frequently, ideally daily. Have a bag or container to store cloth face coverings until they can be laundered with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle. It is not recommended that bleach be used to clean face coverings because the bleach may damage or break down the fibers of the cloth used in the mask. If you must re-wear your cloth face covering before washing it, wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face. Discard cloth face coverings that:

- No longer cover the nose and mouth
- Have stretched out or have damaged ties or straps
- Cannot stay on the face
- Have holes or tears in the fabric

Can I use an N95 respirator or clinical mask instead?

Purchasing a respirator or clinical mask intended for the healthcare setting and emergency responders, such as paramedics (including N95 respirators and clinical masks), is strongly discouraged.

Medical respirators and clinical masks are worn for protection by healthcare staff, first responders and those workers who provide care to a person who might have COVID-19 or other communicable diseases.

Since the intent of the face cover is to primarily protect others rather than the person wearing the cover, a clinical face mask is not necessary.

How do I make a cloth face covering?

The link below from the CDC provides information on how to create different types of cloth face coverings by using items commonly found around the house. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

Again, COVID-19 can be spread by people who have no symptoms, so everyone should act as if they or others around them may be infected. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security.

To protect yourself and others near you, it's best to wear a face covering. We are still under a state of emergency.

Here are some additional tips to protect yourself and others from infection:

- Wear a face covering when around people from other households
- Minimize travel outside the home
- Continue to practice social distancing by making sure six feet is between you and the next person
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or hand sanitizer, especially after touching frequently used items or surfaces
- Refrain from touching your face until your hands are washed or sanitized
- Cover your sneezes and coughs with a tissue, or the inside of your elbow
- Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces often